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SUBJECT: FRANCE: 2005 COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM

REF: STATE 193439

1. (U) Per reftel, enclosed is the 2005 country report on terrorism for France. Embassy point of contact is Poloff Peter Kujawinski, who can be reached on either the classified or unclassified e-mail systems.

France - 2005

OVERVIEW

In 2005, France continued to discover and dismantle terror networks present on its soil, including several that recruited jihadists to Iraq. Following the July bombings in London, French officials worked closely with their British counterparts. They also perceived a number of deficiencies in their counterterrorism capabilities, and proposed legislation to remedy these deficiencies. This legislation is expected to enter into force in early 2006. From March on, the French government has worked to draft a white book on terrorism, with publication expected by the end of the year. A conference in October about the white book underscored the French government's belief that terrorism is a primary strategic threat to France, and that dealing with it is consequentially a central priority. France consults extensively with the U.S. on terrorism, at the tactical and strategic level. In general, counterterrorism cooperation between the U.S. and France is excellent.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

France continues to be an active and engaged participant in the international war against terrorism. On the military front, its special forces participate in counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan and as a part of Task Force 150, a multinational naval force that patrols the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf to interdict the movement of suspected terrorists from Afghanistan to the Arabian Peninsula. In Afghanistan, French Mirage-2000 fighters have flown with USAF fighters to assist American and Afghan ground troops. At the political and diplomatic level, France continues its engagement within the UNSC Counterterrorism Committee and the G-8's Counterterrorism Action Group. France is a party to all 12 international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.

France and the United States continue to cooperate closely on border security issues, including aviation security and the Container Security Initiative. French police and security services have been very responsive to US requests. In addition, France is active internationally in proposing bioterrorism safeguards and nuclear facility safeguards. The U.S. and France continue their dialogue on nuclear security cooperation.

On terrorism financing, France continues to develop the competencies and capabilities of TRACFIN, the Ministry of Finance's terrorism financing coordination and investigation unit. TRACFIN has expanded the number of economic sectors it monitors within the French economy, with a particular emphasis on institutions, non-governmental organizations and small enterprises suspected of having ties to Islamic terrorism. It has also strengthened its coordination with justice and security officials. Within the European Union, France plays an active role in the Clearinghouse, the EU's terrorism financing coordination body. France has designated as terrorist groups those that appear on the EU list of terrorist organizations. France has not designated Hamas-affiliated charities, such as the French-based Comite de Bienfaisance et de Secours aux Palestiniens, arguing that they have no proven links to terrorism. France also opposes EU designation of Lebanese Hizballah as a terrorist organization, though it supports Hizballah's eventual disarmament, which the GoF maintains will be the result of Hizballah's gradual integration into Lebanese politics.

French authorities consistently condemn terrorist acts and have made no public statements in support of a terrorist-supporting country on a terrorism issue. Nevertheless, France, along with its EU partners, retains diplomatic relations with all of the governments designated as state sponsors of terrorism, with the exception of North Korea. It continues to cooperate closely with the United States in pressing for the implementation of UN Security

Council Resolution 1559, which targeted Syrian domination of Lebanon and called for the dismantlement of armed groups and militias in Lebanon (including Hizballah) and extension of Lebanese government control throughout Lebanese territory, to include areas under the de facto control of Hizballah.

French and Spanish authorities have jointly made significant progress in combatting Basque separatist groups, including the ETA. French-Spanish investigative teams focusing on al-Qaida-related groups and Basque separatist groups continue to function. In the first use of the EU arrest warrant for terrorism, French authorities extradited ETA suspect Unai Berrostequieta Eguirra to Spain on February 18.

DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES

France is perhaps best known for its counterterrorism police forces and judiciary. Within the Ministry of Interior, the DST (internal security service), RG (police intelligence), DNAT (counterterrorism brigade) and Brigade Criminelle (criminal investigations) all play important roles in French counterterrorism work. A number of organizations coordinate the activities of the counterterrorist forces, including UCLAT (a counterterrorism coordination unit with the Ministry of Interior), the SGDN (attached to the office of the Prime Minister) and the Council for Internal Security (attached to the office of the President.) Although there is little legislative oversight of intelligence and security agencies, Interior Minister Sarkozy proposed in late November the creation of an oversight working group that will include members of French intelligence and legislators. Sarkozy promised to submit a draft law on this issue by February 15, 2006.

The counterterrorism section of the Paris Prosecutor's office usually leads the French government's terrorism investigations. Investigative judges, who in the French system combine prosecutorial and judicial powers, concentrate on Islamic/international terrorism, Basque/ETA terrorism and terrorism linked to Corsican separatist groups. Their mandate is extensive, and includes terrorist acts on French soil and acts abroad that affect French citizens. Their powers are substantial and they are given wide freedom to investigate. They cooperate closely with French police and security services. In March, then-Justice Minister Dominique Perben announced the hiring of four additional terrorism investigating judges, along with additional support staff, bringing the number of specialized terrorism investigating judges to nine.

French police and intelligence services within the Interior Ministry have extensive powers of surveillance, monitoring and detention. These powers were enhanced with the 2004 passage of the Perben II law and include expanded detention (up to four days before charges must be brought), more authority for police to go undercover, warrants for searches at night, more leeway in granting document searches, and increased authority to wiretap. These expanded powers are to be used only in cases that involve investigation of organizations "that imperil society," such as the mafia, drug traffickers and terrorist organizations. Even if government authorities are found to have misused their new powers, any evidence they have found would still be accepted in court.

The French government continues its policy of expulsions for non-French citizens engaged in activities that promote hate. Interior Minister Sarkozy stated in August that France was monitoring dozens of radical imams. He also announced October 4 that 19 Islamic extremists had been expelled from France since the beginning of the year; 102 have been expelled since 2002. In March, the CSA, France's FCC-equivalent, ordered the Eutelstat satellite company to cease transmitting Sahar 1, an Iranian television station, because of its anti-Semitic and hate-filled broadcasting. Following the CSA's banning of Hizballah-affiliated Al-Manar satellite television, Hizballah deputies lobbied the French government in 2005 to lift the ban. Separately, the Conseil d'Etat, France's highest administrative court, is reviewing an appeal by Al-Manar to reinstate its broadcasting license.

France remains worried over the rise of radical Islam. According to a November 12 press report, the RG, France's police intelligence service, kept 350 places under surveillance (including 42 Islamic prayer halls and 300 businesses) during the first seven months of 2005 because of suspicions of radical Islamist activity. The RG estimates that, of the approximately 5 million Muslims in France, 200,000 are practicing and of that number, between 5,000 and 9,000 are linked to extremist causes.

French officials are also concerned regarding the role of prisons in converting petty criminals to jihadism. Prisons served as a center of recruitment for the Safe Bourrada terror network (dismantled in late September, see below). According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Justice in September, 358 people are imprisoned for terrorism; 159

are Basque-related, 94 are Islamic extremists and 76 are Corsica-related. France has proposed several measures to address Islamic extremism in prisons, including the establishment of a corps of moderate Muslim prison chaplains.

The July bombings in London caused many French officials to reexamine their counterterrorism capabilities. In addition to the initial reaction of elevating the Vigipirate alert system and coordinating closely with British officials, the French government soon proposed a new counterterrorist bill that calls for increasing video surveillance in public areas, allowing police more access to phone and Internet records, and more closely monitoring international travel by ship, rail and plane.

Under French law, terrorism suspects may be detained for up to 96 hours before charges are filed. The new bill making its way through the legislature proposes extending the 96-hour period an additional 48 hours, for a maximum total detention of 144 hours. Suspects can be held for up to three and a half years in pretrial detention while the investigation against them continues. Other proposed measures in the bill include increasing the maximum penalty for association with a terrorist enterprise from 10 to 20 years in prison, and increasing the maximum penalty for terrorist enterprise organizers from 20 to 30 years in prison. The National Assembly approved the bill in late November. The Senate is expected to take up discussion of the bill in December, with probable approval in January 2006.

Another reaction to the July bombings in London was a decision by the French government to encourage the heads of its domestic intelligence agencies - RG and the DST - to take on more public roles, in order to sensitize the public to the threat of terrorism. In a related action, the French government, in coordination with a local think-tank, opened a public website focused on the details of past terrorist acts, at <https://bdt.frstrategie.org>

French police and security officials conducted a large-scale exercise in November that simulated multiple chemical attacks throughout Paris. Local prefectures, especially Paris, have instituted PRM, a French acronym for "plan red - multiple" that focuses attention on the prospect of multiple attacks, either simultaneous or sequential. A similar large-scale chemical attack simulation took place May 9 in the Val d'Oise region. In addition, the Paris Prefecture has created a specialized NRBC unit of firefighters.

MAJOR COUNTERTERRORIST ACTIONS - 2005

On January 26, French police arrested eleven people (three of whom were eventually charged with terrorism conspiracy) in Paris, 19th arrondissement for reportedly recruiting young French residents to launch terrorist attacks in Iraq. It was the first arrest since the opening in September 2004 of an investigation by the Paris Prosecutor's office into "jihadists to Iraq." French intelligence, security and judicial authorities have consistently identified the conflict in Iraq as an attractive force for French jihadists. French officials stated in November that 22 young people had left for Iraq, and at least seven had been killed there, including two suicide bombers.

Djamel Beghal, the ringleader of a group arrested in 2001 on suspicion of planning to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Paris, was convicted March 15 of "terrorist conspiracy," and received a maximum 10-year sentence. His five accomplices were all found guilty as well, and received sentences ranging from one year to nine years in prison.

The last three French nationals detained at Guantanamo were transferred to French custody on March 7, following the transfer of four nationals in 2004. France released Mustaq Ali Patel in March and Imad Kanouni in July. The other five remain in pretrial detention and may be charged with terrorist conspiracy. The former Guantanamo detainees, detention has withstood multiple appeals by defense lawyers. France has been one of the most aggressive and proactive countries in prosecuting its citizens formerly held by the U.S. at Guantanamo.

On April 24, French police in Paris arrested Said al-Maghrebi, an Afghanistan training camp veteran, on suspicion of organizing potential jihadists to fight in Iraq. Four others reportedly belonging to al-Maghrebi's network were arrested in Paris and Marseilles. Two were later released.

A French court on May 16 declared five people guilty of organizing logistic support for the suicide bombers who assassinated Afghan Commander Ahmad Sheikh Massoud on September 9, 2001. The five were sentenced to between two and nine years imprisonment.

On May 20, a Paris court condemned Corsican nationalist Charles Pieri to 10 years in prison for terrorism finance

conspiracy and extortion.

French police arrested Hamid Bach on June 21 in the city of Montpellier on suspicions of organizing a terrorist ring focused on attacking targets in France and sending potential jihadists to Iraq.

French police arrested 9 people in late September on suspicion of belonging to a terrorist group. According to press reports, the group, reportedly led by GSPC sympathizer and convicted terrorist Safe Bourrada, was in the initial phases of planning terrorist attacks against targets in France, including the Paris Metro, Orly airport and the headquarters of the DST, France's internal security service. Four more suspected members of the Bourrada network were arrested in early October.

On November 29, French police arrested six people suspected of financing extremist and terrorist causes. One of them was a prison guard and two were former Islamic chaplains. The group reportedly had visited Bosnia and attempted to recruit jihadists to Iraq. The group belonged to the fundamentalist Tabligh movement.

British authorities transferred Rashid Ramda to French custody on December 1. Ramda is the suspected financier of the 1995 GIA attacks in the Saint-Michel RER train station, the Musee d'Orsay RER train station and the Maison-Blanche metro station. Ramda had been in British custody for the last ten years, and his extradition to France removes a major irritant in French-British relations.

On December 12, French police arrested approximately 25 people, in the largest terror-related sweep in Europe since the aftermath of the Madrid bombings in 2004. Those arrested are suspected of involvement with terrorist financing. The reported ringleader is Ouassini Cherifi, a French-Algerian who had spent time in prison for passport fraud. French police suspect he, like Safe Bourrada, recruited low-level criminals to his network while in prison.

Judicial investigations following the arrests in 2003 of German national Christian Ganczarski and Moroccan national Karim Mehdi continued in 2005. Ganczarski and Mehdi, who are suspected of ties to al-Qaida, remain in pretrial detention in France.

The judicial investigation into the activities of six suspected members of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) arrested in 2004 continues. The six suspects are being held in pretrial detention and are thought to have provided logistical support to those who committed the attacks against Madrid trains on March 11, 2004.

Investigations into the "Chechen network," a loose grouping that is reported to have links with the Beghal network and the Frankfurt network (which attempted in 2000 to attack cultural sites in Strasbourg, including the cathedral) have concluded, although a trial date for those arrested has not been set. Members of the Chechen network reportedly were interested in using chemical agents to commit terrorist attacks. Several suspected members of the Chechen network were arrested in France in 2005.

Corsica continues to experience low-level terrorist activities. Recent attacks have occurred against peoples of North African ancestry. The FLNC Union of Combatants claimed responsibility for firing a rocket on September 29 at the prefecture in Ajaccio. The rocket attack did not cause any injuries, although it exploded a few meters from where the prefect and a receptionist were working. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at: <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Stapleton